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ABSTRACT

Evaluations of compensatory education programs provided under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) indicate that the traditional provision of a less challenging curriculum, limited achievement goals, and emphasis on pull-out programs for compensatory instruction actually hamper the ability of low-achieving students to develop critical thinking skills, lower their learning expectations, and stigmatize them as inferior. Because of a lack of coordination between regular and compensatory education classes, Chapter 1 students end up with less instructional time than other students, and the reading skills teaching they receive is not related to other learning and study areas. Chapter 1's emphasis on mastery learning techniques that may improve standardized test scores fails to help students learn how to work independently and develop cognitive strategies. Disadvantaged students continue to be taught relatively low-level reading skills that do not transfer to the higher-level knowledge and skills that comprise literacy. Remedial mathematics programs have been criticized for fragmenting the curriculum into enrichment programs, differential programs, and developmentally based programs rather than emphasizing the interdependence of ideas and the use of reasonable procedures to arrive at an answer. Disadvantaged students need access to a sound core curriculum that is as rich and balanced as that provided to high achieving students. (FMW)

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Enriching the Compensatory Education Curriculum for Disadvantaged Students

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by A. Harry Passow

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ENRICHING THE COMPENSATORY EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

The Status Quo

The development of compensatory education programs has traditionally been informed by the belief that disadvantaged students can benefit most from a less challenging curriculum and limited achievement goals. Thus, Chapter 1 services, provided through the federal Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, comprise curricula stressing basic skills in reading and mathematics, vocational rather than academic programs, and a slower instructional pace. Unfortunately, according to Levin (1987), this approach further hampers the ability of low achieving students to develop thinking skills, lowers their learning expectations, and stigmatizes them as inferior.

Moreover, the pullout activities that characterize most Chapter 1 programs contribute to curricular fragmentation and cause students to miss significant portions of the core curriculum taught in regular classes. Since pullout instruction is usually limited to remedial reading and mathematics, Chapter 1 students may totally miss social studies and science instruction.

Evaluations of Chapter 1 "effectiveness" reinforce this curriculum deficiency by measuring only the improvement in scores on reading and arithmetic tests, and by failing to deal with the overall achievement of students.

Coordination of Regular and Compensatory Education Classes

Often there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of compensatory education services, with divergent perceptions found among the Chapter 1 support staff, the core classroom teachers, and administrators. Most studies indicate that there are few efforts to coordinate various special or supplementary programs with core or regular programs, few procedures for cooperative/joint planning among the various program teachers at the school, and even fewer district- or building-level policies to foster cooperative planning among the various suppliers of programs or services. Thus, Chapter 1 students often end up with less instructional time than other students. For instance, regular classroom teachers often report that Chapter 1 reading resource teachers rarely offer instructional information, suggestions, or materials. Support program teachers are often unable to identify the reading instruction material their remedial students use in the regular classroom. Regular classroom and reading resource teachers are often confused about who is responsible for which aspects of instructional planning and delivery. Reading is often taught as an "unrelated skill"—i.e., reading of reading texts—not as a skill needed for other learning and study areas. What is needed is congruence between curricula—what is to be taught, in what order, and using which materials, and between the methods of instruction (Allington & Johnson, 1986). Conflicts arise when the reading strategies taught and learned in one setting are radically different from those in the second setting, such as emphasis on decoding versus a focus on comprehension.

Cognitive Development

A sound educational program provides for learning opportunities in both cognitive and affective areas, in skills of learning how-to-learn and learning how to be a "student." However, Chapter 1 services emphasize mastery learning techniques that may improve scores on standardized tests, but fail to help students learn how to work independently and develop coherent mental representations for school work in general (Doyle, 1986).

If there is a trend, at least among the theorists and researchers, it is that curriculum and instruction for the disadvantaged should emphasize developmental over remedial learning. Cognitive science research in mathematics and reading underscores the importance of emphasis on meaning and understanding beginning in the early elementary grades. The Commission on Reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) concluded that from the beginning children should be given *all* of the elements necessary for constructing meaning because they must be made aware that reading is always directed toward meaning. However, Chapter 1 students receive more instruction in factual and lower-level skills—drill and practice—and less in higher-order skills.

Peterson (1986) concluded that low achieving students can successfully be taught a variety of cognitive strategies, such as memory, elaboration, self-questioning, rehearsal, planning and goal setting, comprehension, problem-solving, hypothesis generating and study skills; and that compensatory education should give greater emphasis to their development. Adams (1986) encourages teaching thinking skills to allow students to create the "schema" necessary for the mind to store, order, and make sense of various observations, facts, and events that they are exposed to.

It should be noted, however, that, as another pullout activity taught by someone other than the regular classroom teacher, a "thinking class" can create as many problems as it solves; compensatory education should give greater emphasis to the development of students' cognitive strategies—the strategies needed for learning (learning how-

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to-learn skills).

Reading

Despite efforts over the last quarter century to improve the reading achievement of disadvantaged students, the correlation between economic status and reading achievement remains (Calfee, 1986). In addition, Calfee asserts, literacy does not begin with a concept of basic skills or minimum competency; a literate person has "an approach to language that transcends the medium of print" (p. IV-51). Nevertheless, disadvantaged students are taught relatively low-level skills that do not transfer to the higher level knowledge and skills that comprise literacy (Calfee, 1986). More attention needs to be paid to integrating the reading, writing, and oral language elements of literacy and comprehension.

Mathematics

If remedial reading programs fail to provide opportunities for cognitive development, their mathematics counterpart narrows the students' focus even further. Romberg (1986) observed that compensatory programs in mathematics fall into three broad categories: *enrichment programs*, which are supposed to provide low-income children with experiences and intellectual challenges that the middle-class have; *differential programs*, which treat disadvantaged students differently from middle-class children, and are comprised of mastery learning that uses computers and other aids as management tools and standardized tests as assessment instruments; or direct drill methods that teach arithmetic skills by emphasizing right answers rather than appropriate processes; and *developmentally based programs*, which are geared to the level of a child's conceptual thoughts after his or her cognitive functioning has been determined.

Romberg (1986) argues that a mathematically sound program should not fragment math into literally thousands of pieces as these methods do. Rather it would provide all children with an opportunity to learn mathematics by emphasizing the interdependence of ideas and the use of reasonable procedures to arrive at an answer. Math should be conceived as "a language and a science that orders the universe, a tool for representing situations, defining relationships, solving problems, and thinking" (p. V-17).

Challenge and Coherence

The curriculum for disadvantaged students should not be limited to pullout instruction in reading and math. It should be as rich and balanced as that provided high achieving students. While student success on basic tests of reading and achievement is important, such minimal competencies are only a part of the total educational goals and objectives for all students.

Disadvantaged students need access to a sound core curriculum of reading and language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, fine arts, health, physical education, and even possibly a second language. They also need access to vocational and technical curricula, and a rich array of electives. The skills, knowledge, understanding, and insights that constitute a general and common education (especially at the elementary level) are essential for all children. They constitute the "cultural imperatives," and the remediation services of compensatory education should provide access to them.

—A. Harry Passow

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